

# Gambel's Quail

*Callipepla gambelii*

Gambel's Quail are gregarious birds of the desert Southwest, where coveys gather along brushy washes and cactus-studded arroyos to feed. Males and females both sport a bobbing black topknot of feathers. The male's prominent black belly patch distinguishes it from the similar California Quail (the two species' ranges don't overlap). This ground-hugging desert dweller would rather run than fly—look for these tubby birds running between cover or posting a lookout on low shrubs.

## Keys to Identification

### Size and Shape

Like other quail, Gambel's Quail are plump, volleyball-sized birds with short necks, small bill, and square tail. The wings are short and broad. Both sexes have a comma-shaped topknot of feathers atop their small heads, fuller in males than females.

### Color Pattern

Richly patterned in gray, chestnut, and cream that can serve as excellent camouflage. Males have a bright rufous crest, chestnut flanks striped with white, and creamy belly with black patch. Females are grayer, lacking the strong head pattern. Neither sex is as strongly scaled as the California Quail is.

### Behavior

Gambel's Quails walk or run along the ground in groups called coveys that can include a dozen or more birds. They scratch for food under shrubs and cacti, eating grasses and cactus fruits. Flight is explosive, powerful, and short.

### Habitat

Lives in the hot deserts of the Southwest—the Sonoran, Mohave, and Chihuahuan—below about 5,500 feet elevation. Frequents mesquite thickets along river valleys and arroyos, shrublands and cactus, dry grasslands, and agricultural fields.

### Cool Facts

- Just before her eggs hatch, the female Gambel's Quail calls to the chicks, who cheep to each other from inside the eggs. The eggs hatch in synchrony, with the chick cutting a neat hole in the largest part of the shell and leaving an intact piece of membrane to serve as a "hinge" — the chick pushes on the shell and opens the "door" that it has created.

### Measurements

#### Both Sexes

- Length - 9.8 inches
- Wingspan - 13.4 - 14.2 inches
- Weight - 5.6 - 7.1 ounces

